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Bible Burning in Mexico

An Address given by Mr. Eglon Harris, at Church House, Westminster, on Wednesday evening, May 19, 1915.

In calling to mind instances of the destruction of the Word of God by Roman Catholics in Mexico, I may mention that not only copies of what some Romanists call a perverted version of the Scriptures have been burned, but their own Roman version, translated with the authority and permission of Pope Pius. Hundreds of such New Testaments forwarded with a permit from Rome, and prefaced by a letter of the Archbishop of Chile, were sent from this country into the State of Yucatan. The Bishop of Merida, finding that many of his former communicants did not appear at the time of Mass, nor come to confession, made inquiry as to the cause, and found that it was on account of these New Testaments printed in London and sent to Mexico to a Roman Catholic priest. These were afterwards collected, and we know that hundreds were burned. I was able myself to secure fourteen of them, and they are kept in Mexico to show to any who do not believe that those who profess to be the servants of Christ would burn the Word of God.

The first instance I should like to relate was in the town of Tehuacan. I was walk-

ing through the streets one day, reflecting rather sadly that, of all the books I had distributed, I did not know of one that had been read—they were torn up at once—tracts, Gospels, New Testaments. Just then a Major met me and said: "Do you know anything about those books that have been burnt? I want a large-print one." A few weeks later I sent him such a copy as he required, when he observed: "Now I shall want someone to explain it to me." I gladly offered to go every day to read and explain the Scriptures to him.

Some weeks later the Major sent for me in haste. Holding out a burnt Bible to me, he said: "What do you think of it?" "I am sorry," I said, "to see you have burnt the Word of God, after all we have spoken together about this book." "Oh! do not think I burnt it." He then explained that he had a servant, who, in confession, had told the priest that he was reading this book. The priest ordered her to take it away from him, and the next morning it was missing. The Major questioned his wife, and then called the servants together to see if they knew anything about it. As no one acknowledged touching it, he said he would call in the soldiers to clear everything out of the house, for he would have the book found! This so frightened the girl that she said: "Please, sir, I took it to the priest." "Then you must go and get it back," said the Major. After

many difficulties from the priest's reported absence, first in one place and then in another, he was tracked to his house, which stood on one side of a public square. The Major then brought out two battalions, containing eight hundred soldiers, and they lined up in the square, encircling the priest's house. Finding denials were useless, the priest eventually called his cook, and the Bible was produced. She had put it into the fire as directed, but naturally a closed book would not burn!

The Major then wished to know why the priest had wished to burn that Bible. It seemed such an opportunity for spreading the Gospel, that I said to him: "Would it not be well to tell it to the whole of the eight hundred soldiers?" "Yes, for they know all about it." In the barrack yard the men were lined up, a little table was set, and the burnt Bible placed on it with my own Bible. There, on that Saturday afternoon, I was able to tell them why the priest burnt the Bible. With such texts as "There is no other Name," "Without money and without price," I explained the matter to them. After I had finished, the Major asked if each soldier could have a Bible. This meant an expense of 800 dollars, 800 times 3s. 6d. On going an hour or so later to the post office I found one letter there containing £5 to purchase Scriptures for free distribution. If ever I had a proof

that God is over His own work, it was then and there. We had gone on for over twelve months, sorrowing over the lack of results but now there were eight hundred men ready to seize some portion of the Word of God, and someone in England had it put into her heart to send us £5 for free distribution to cover the cost. Within a few weeks these men all had some portion of the Word of God, and the Major set some of the most intelligent of the men to give reading lessons, so that in six months every one of these eight hundred men could read!

Through this incident I obtained an introduction to other barracks in the country. The Major, after his conversion (which, I think, had not taken place at the time when the Bible was burned, although that led him to further inquiry) actively helped in furthering the distribution of Gospels and tracts amongst the soldiers in Mexico, and during the twenty years that have passed since that time we have had the joy of handing some portion of the Word of God to 75,000 soldiers. Many of them have professed faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

At that time we had been driven from house to house. In the fourth house we had occupied, my dear wife was taken ill. While she lay dying, a woman tried to carry off our little girl. I ran after her, and having crossed several streets I overtook her at the Temple door of the Roman Catholic Church.

Fourteen years later, at a service in Orizaba, several persons were baptized. One of them, a woman, told me that she had kidnapped my little girl. The priest had formed a league against me, and it was agreed to steal away my child and have her baptized, so that I would cease to have any claim upon her. "Now," said the woman, "instead of the priest baptizing Elgie, you have baptized me."

This is only one of the numerous instances where we have seen that Satan has been outwitted. The very fact that this woman was tempted to steal away our child and get her baptized led to her own conversion and baptism fourteen years later.

I went into a house one day where there were two men, to whom I presented a Bible, told them the price, and asked them if they would like to buy it. One said: "I could not read this." Thinking that he referred to his eyesight, I spoke in Spanish, meaning to say, "I suppose your sight is not good?" What I really said was: "I suppose you have the evil eye?" (I did not know Spanish so well then.) They laughed, and bought a Bible each, then asked me to come into the street. Shaking the Bibles from the covers, they burned each one! Afterwards I found that one of them had given me a bad dollar. A shopkeeper across the street called me to him and said: "Do you know who these men are?" "No." "They are priests in laymen's clothes." He then asked me if I would come over once a month and let him be my agent in Cordova for the distribution of the Word of God. The result was that soon we were having meetings there, through the burning of these two Bibles in the public street.

When living in Orizaba, I was returning from a missionary journey when I got into conversation with an Indian chief. He called four hundred Indians, to whom I spoke of the Saviour. I left with them a few copies of the

Gospels, but I had only gone about one mile towards home when I was overtaken and clapped into prison, and a huge beam placed against the door. About half an hour later the beam was moved, and the door swung open. A voice said: "Now you may go." I stepped outside, but saw no one, so thankfully started on my eight miles walk to Orizaba. About seven months later a Mexican met me, and said: "I should advise you not to go to Ixhuatlancillo, unless you carry a pistol. I am the judge of Ixhuatlancillo—your wife saved my wife's life. Seven months ago I went to see the chief, and he told me he had a prisoner. From his description I knew it must be you, so I insisted upon your release." I then learned that I had been imprisoned by order of the priest.

On one occasion I visited Tlacotalpan, where the Roman version of the Scriptures had been circulated. A girl called to me across the street: "Do you know anything of a book which tells of some girls being invited to a wedding, and they went to buy wine?" She showed me the leaf of a burnt Bible, saying: "I picked this up," and pointed out to me the words, "and while they went to buy, came the bridegroom." After the word "came" the page was torn away. (The Spanish word for "came" (vino) also means wine.) This led to my giving this girl a copy of the New Testament. The next time I went to Tlacotalpan, I met with some men who said: "We were hoping to see you to talk to you about having a meeting in this place." They had met together and drawn up a paper signed by twelve prominent persons in the town, asking that we should send a teacher to teach this book. We have sold 124 Bibles in that place. This happened something like eighteen years ago.

Further information about Scripture Distribution in Spanish-speaking lands will be cheerfully furnished upon application to the Secretary of the Bible House of Los Angeles, 643 South Olive Street, Los Angeles, California, U. S. A.